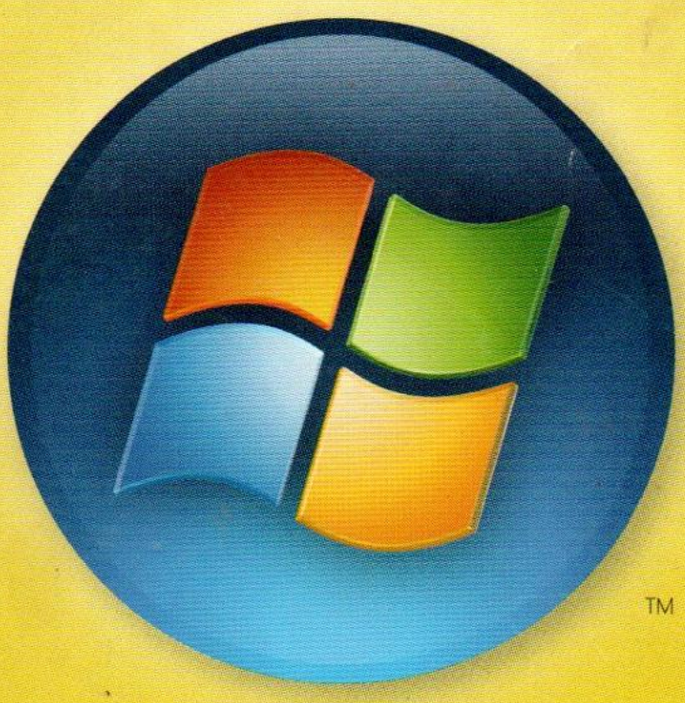
Security and customisation

The Essential Vista Guide



Save on support calls by solving PC problems yourself. Stay secure, customise your PC, and more!

Welcome

Windows Vista – it's the ultimate user-friendly operating system. But that doesn't stop any of us running into the odd PC problem or frustration now and then. Fortunately, because Windows Vista is so accessible and easy to use, it's also far easier to establish a problem and source a remedy, or make a simple but effective improvement. There's no need to phone a helpline if you're looking for assistance – just help yourself to the hundreds of tips in this book!

In this second part of our Tech Support Bible, we're covering PC security, from making sure your children are safe on your computer to protecting your identity online. We're also looking at customising your computer so that everything's exactly how you want it. Whether it's overhauling the Start Menu, bringing back the classic Windows style or tweaking your power-saving settings, it's all in here.

And remember, you can always find extra help at www.windows vistamagazine.com or support.microsoft.com.

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Windows Vista security tips

Your PC and data have never been so secure – we show you how to get the most from the advanced security features buried deep inside your operating system

Windows Vista – and this isn't hyperbole – is the most secure version of Windows to date. While there are continuing security patches, they're at such a low-level that realistically there's little chance they could be exploited. Add into the mix the fact that Windows Vista by default comes bristling with a set of defensive tools to send a shiver down the spine of the hardiest of hackers, and we can all sleep easy. Well, perhaps.

Protecting everything

The truth is, security is an umbrella term that covers far more than just hacker attacks. There's general data protection – no one wants to lose precious digital photographs. Child safety is also a major issue; protecting them from unwanted attention online is a serious business, not to mention protecting your files from them and preventing them playing unsuitable games and DVDs. All of these things and more can be done with the new integrated tools and features. Setting them up can take just moments, so stop acting like bad things never happen and get yourself some digital protection!

Protect your valuable data

SCHEDULE REGULAR COMPUTER BACK UPS

Type 'backup' into Start Search and select the Backup and Restore Center. Now click the **Back up Files** button. Select whether to save to CD, DVD or external hard drive. Decide which types of files you want to include in the back-up, such as TV shows, emails, and so on. Hovering over each category reveals more details about what is included. Choose how frequently you want to perform the backup. Obviously, the frequency will depend on how often you add to or change files on your hard drive. Click **Save settings and start backup** and Windows Vista will scan your files and then copy them to your backup device. If backing up to CD/DVD, you'll be prompted to insert a blank disc first.

RESTORE YOUR FILES

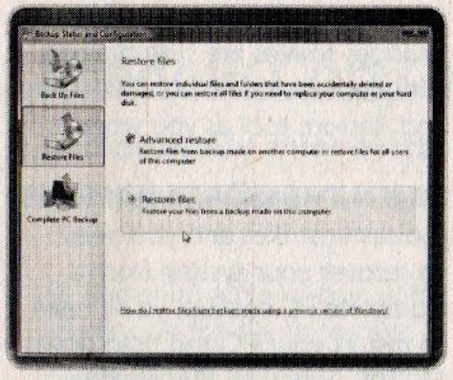
If you need to restore files later, plug the back-up drive into your PC, or put the back-up DVD into the drive, go to Backup and Restore Center, click **Restore Files**, and choose to restore. Click **Add files...** to browse files on your back-up drive. Select the files to restore and click **Next**. Choose whether to restore to original locations or a new one, then click on **Start restore**.

RESTORE AN OLDER VERSION

If you've been doing back-ups, you can simply restore the file. Windows Vista Ultimate and Business editions have another trick, though, called 'shadow copies' – copies of files and folders that Windows automatically saves as part of a restore point. To revert to a shadow copy, right-click the file you want to restore, choose **Restore previous versions**, and then choose the one that you want to revert to.

PICK THE RIGHT MEDIA

You can back up to CD or DVD, although you're restricted by capacities – 650MB for individual CDs, 4.7GB (or 8.4GB if you have a dual-layer drive and compatible discs) for DVDs. The Windows Vista Backup and Restore tool will split your back-up so it can be spanned across many discs, but this isn't very practical if you're updating your back-up regularly.



As long as you've backed up your files, you should be able to recover them safely in an emergency

CHOOSE A LOCATION

You can back up to another location on your network, like a shared folder or a Network Attached Storage device. It's quick and simple to set up, but that device does need to be switched on when your back-up runs, and expect performance to be hampered by the speed of your network connection, particularly if it's wireless.

BACKING UP TO AN EXTERNAL HARD DRIVE

The easiest back-up option is to use an external hard drive. These can be attached via a USB or Firewire port, which are much quicker than a network connection. Some PCs also come with eSATA ports – external ports that work with a limited number of drives, but which offer superior performance to even USB or Firewire. Capacities vary widely; choose one with plenty of space.

BACK UP ONLINE

While it's not supported by Backup and Restore in Windows Vista, an ever increasingly popular option is to back up online. Various service providers offer space, as do some security programs, which makes it an ever more realistic option.

Complete system back-up

GET MORE OF A BACK-UP

If you're running Windows Vista Business, Enterprise or Ultimate edition, you'll notice another option in the Backup and Restore Center – Back up computer. This launches the Windows Complete Backup tool, which enables you to back up key files and settings that will help you to get Windows Vista back up and running should your PC fail – your programs and preferences will be preserved, making it a more convenient option than reinstalling Windows Vista from scratch.

DIY COMPLETE BACK-UP

If you don't have access to the Windows Complete Backup tool, you'll need to install a third-party solution that will enable you to create an image of your hard drive. Programs such as Norton Ghost (buy it from www.symantec.com) provide a way to create a complete image of your installation.

ACCESSING SHADOW COPIES

Shadow Copies (available in Windows Vista Business, Enterprise and Ultimate editions) work in conjunction with System Protection (**Control Panel ➜ System and Maintenance ➜ System**, click on **System Protection**). Incremental changes to files are stored along with backups taken by the Backup and Restore tool as you work.

WHEN THE WORST HAPPENS

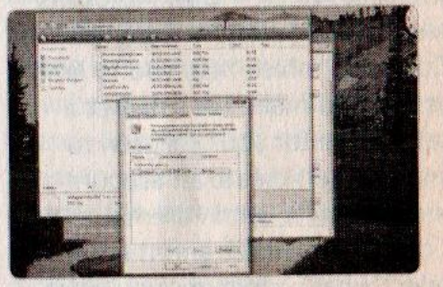
If disaster strikes and you need to recover your system from a Complete PC backup, you'll need to restart your PC and hold down **F8**. This brings up the Windows Recovery Environment, from which you can then select the Windows Complete PC Restore option. If your computer won't boot up properly, boot from your Windows Vista installation disc, choose **Repair my computer** when prompted and click **Windows Complete PC Restore**.

Third-party applications provide an alternative way to image your hard drive

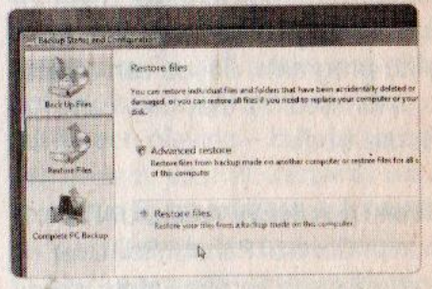
Shadow Copy in action

Accidentally overwritten or erased a file? Windows Vista can quickly retrieve it for you

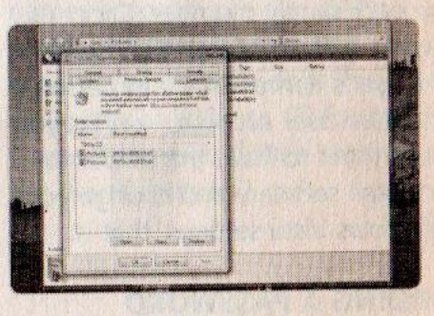
1 Restoring a file is easy: right-click on the file to recover, choose **Properties** and click on the **Previous Versions** tab. A list of previous versions will appear in the list. Click on the version you want and click on **Restore**.



2 You can also use Shadow Copy to restore deleted files. Simply find the folder that originally contained the file you want, right-click (making sure you're not right-clicking on a file), and choose **Properties ➜ Previous Versions**.



3 Choose the version that you want to restore and then click on the **Restore** button. This will replace the entire folder with an earlier version, so it will not only restore files but it will also remove anything added afterwards.



Child-friendly

PROTECT YOUR CHILDREN

One of the big advantages of Windows Vista is that it comes with built-in Parental Controls (**Control Panel ➜ User Accounts and Family Safety ➜ Parental Controls**), which help you to limit access and make the internet a safer place for your children to explore. You create an account for each child, with Parental Controls activated, and then select what restrictions you want to put in place. You can use the standard settings to block them from visiting certain web sites or using programs, or you can create a customised list that they can choose from.

CREATE A NEW ACCOUNT

Launch Control Panel, click **User Accounts and Family Safety**, then click **User Accounts**. It's a good idea to have a separate account for each family member. Click **Create a New Account** and enter the user's name. Give that person a standard user account – unless you want them to have the power to uninstall software and change your Windows Vista settings, that is.

ADDING A PASSWORD

Click on the new account name and then click **Create a Password.** Now only the person you've assigned this account to will be able to access it.

PARENTAL CONTROLS

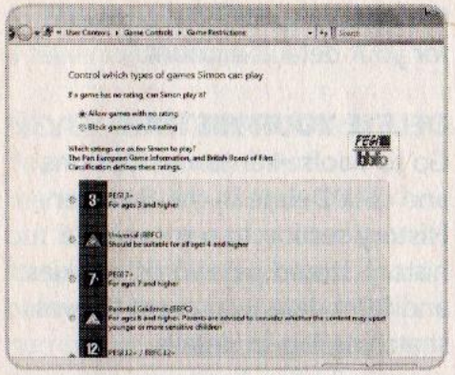
Within the User Accounts, to see the parental controls for a particular account you must click on the account name. As you should see, the parental controls for an account are switched off by default. Switching them on is simple – just click on the **On, enforce current settings** button under Parental Controls.

MONITOR ACTIVITY

An account with active parental controls will have its **Reporting** on. Whenever this user is logged in, it will record what programs they've used, what games they've played and whether they've tried to do things you've blocked them from doing. The Activity Reports are a little bit too severe to use on older children. If you're at all worried about the young ones, however, they will give you a detailed report about everything they've been doing on your computer.

SET TIME LIMITS TO COMPUTER USE

If you click on **Time Limits** you'll see an empty grid; you can block times by colouring them in with the mouse – if that user attempts to log on to your PC during a



Don't worry about your children playing unsuitable games – the Windows Vista restrictions will protect them

blocked period, Windows will turn them away. While configuring the limits, click inside the grid to set when your child is allowed access to your PC. Allowed hours are white, and blocked hours are blue.

MAKE SURE YOUR CHILDREN SURF SAFELY

Rather than trying to create a list of the sites your child can't visit – there are simply too many – work together to create a list of allowed sites that suit you both. Click **Windows Vista Web Filter** and you can specify whether the user can access the entire internet, or if they should be kept away from certain sites and downloads. For maximum security, you can create an **Allow** list of safe sites.

PUT A STOP TO PROGRAMS

This tool will definitely come in handy if you have a teenage daughter and a mischievous son who thinks it would be hilarious to read her online diary. You can stop specific users launching certain programs – also very handy if you don't want others to see your finances in Microsoft Money. Click **Allow and Block Specific Programs** to see a list of the software on your PC. You now have two options: let the user launch any program, or restrict them to specific software. If you choose the latter, any programs you don't tick in the list won't be available to that user.

GORE-FREE GAMING

If the box says 'Hello Kitty' but the game is really Hell Kitten, you may not know exactly what the kids have been playing – but, by using this control, your PC certainly will. From the **Parental Controls** menu, click on **Games**. You can choose to block games altogether, block or allow specific games, or limit games by age rating. Restricting games according to age rating is one of the easiest ways to ensure that children don't play inappropriate games. Click on **Set Game Ratings** and then choose the classification.

Protect your identity

GO PHISHING
Be aware that the Phishing Filter is turned off by default – you'll need to enable it. Go to **Tools ➜ Phishing Filter ➜ Turn On Automatic Website Checking**. The filter combines local checks with a database comparison.

ALWAYS PROTECTED WITH IE7
Internet Explorer 7 users on Windows Vista have an extra layer of security, with its always-on Protected Mode, designed to provide fortification against 'elevation of privilege' attacks, where malware programs attempt to change data on your machine without your consent.

QUICKLY CHECK A SITE FOR PHISHING SCAMS
Hit **Alt** and **O**, followed by **H** then **C** to quickly check a web site using Internet Explorer 7's phishing filter (if you prefer to leave automatic checking switched off).

PASSWORD PROTECT
If thieves swipe your laptop or gain physical access to your machine, malware protection won't help. Password-protecting your account will, though. Go to **User Accounts** in the **Control Panel** and check that you've specified a password for your default account.

DELETE YOUR HISTORY
Go to **Tools ➜ Internet Options** and click **Delete** in the **Browser History** section to remove your history, stored passwords, cookies and form data to prevent thieves snatching log-in details.

SET PARENTAL CONTROLS
Kids could give away personal details online or allow a site to install malware. Go to the **Control Panel** and click **Set up Parental Controls** in **User Accounts and Family Safety** to restrict them.

OPT OUT OF MARKETING
Limit your visible virtual presence. Tick the opt out box on the Electoral Roll form, make your phone number ex-directory and never give out personal details on net profiles or chat rooms.

KEEP YOUR PASSWORD CHANGING
Don't use the same password for everything. Try to use combinations of letters and numbers that do not form words or guessable dates.

FAKE YOUR MOTHER'S NAME
Banks or online sites often use your mother's maiden name as a security question, but that's easy for fraudsters to find out, so give a fake maiden name.

NEVER WAIT FOR FRAUD
Your birthday may be a memorable date for your PIN, but it's also the easiest number for an ID thief to guess and if you believe that your password, PIN number or security questions have been compromised, call your bank immediately.

KEEP ON SHREDDING
Bills and statements are easy pickings for ID thieves; shred personal documents before disposing of them.

GET YOURSELF OFF THAT LIST
Remove yourself from marketing databases using the following services:

ADMA Stop Junk Mail (www.adma.com.au)

Email Preference Service (www.e-mps.org)

Do Not Call www.donotcall.gov.au

BE WARY OF EMAILS
Never reply to spam. You'll confirm that your email address is real for scammers. Avoid clicking on links contained within emails that purport to be from your credit card provider or online stores – this could be phishing material.

BEEF UP YOUR HOME SECURITY BY GOING PUBLIC
If you're the only user on your wireless network, with no need to share files or printers with anyone, protect yourself from possible intrusion by changing it to a public connection – open the Network and Sharing Center and click on **Customize**.

SECURE YOUR WIRELESS NETWORK NOW!
Your wireless network extends a lot further than you think – out on to the street and into next door's home. Keep unwanted computers away by encrypting your network connection with a password through your router. Choose WPA-PSK (Personal Shared Key) and also change the password used to access your router while you're at it.

Make sure you turn on the Internet Explorer 7 Phishing Filter to protect you before going surfing

User Account Control

WHY USE UAC?

Windows XP had an Achilles heel: by default, when you installed it you had administrator access. As an administrator you had total control over your system, so that you could change system settings, install software and make any modifications you liked. Unfortunately, though, that access was quickly exploited – if you were running in administrator mode and a bit of malicious software sneaked on to your system, it too had administrative access, and this could cause chaos for your data and files. If you've ever suffered from malware (for example, when your PC blasts you with unwanted adverts or your browser home page gets changed without your knowledge), then you've seen the problem in action. In Windows Vista, a new feature called User Access Control – UAC – provides the solution by preventing any system changes from happening without your knowledge.

UAC AS AN ADMINISTRATOR

UAC works in two ways. If you're logged in as the computer administrator (which, as the owner of the PC, you probably will be), system changes no longer happen silently. Instead, the UAC warning will pop up and nothing will happen if you don't click **Continue**. The idea here is to stamp out unauthorised activity.

UAC FOR OTHER USERS

If you're not signed in to an administrator account, the User Account Control warnings look different. You can't simply click on **Continue** to get rid of the warning – you'll need to provide a valid administrator password to continue. If you don't know the password – which, unless you're the administrator, you won't – then you won't be able to continue. It's an effective way of preventing other people from making a mess of your PC or installing things they shouldn't.

TURNING OFF UAC

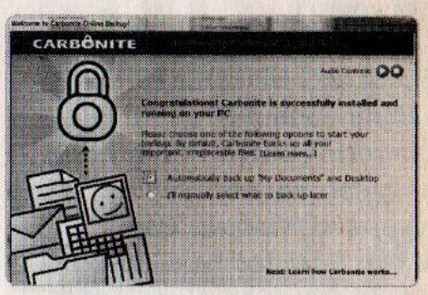
It can be a chore during the early stages, but once you've got your PC set up, you see the UAC far less frequently, and your PC is much safer. If you really must – although it's not recommended – you can turn it off by launching Control Panel and then clicking **User Accounts and Family Safety ➜ User Accounts ➜ Turn User Account Control on or off**.

Back up your files online

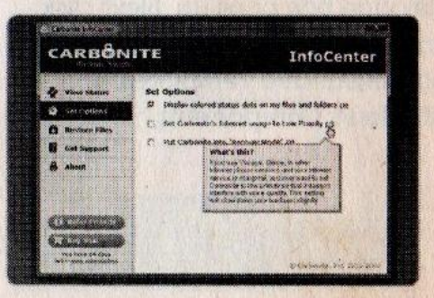
Carbonite offers unlimited space to keep your files safe and secure for a small fee

1 Head to www.carbonite.com. Sign up for the free 15-day trial by providing your email address and choosing a password. Click **Sign Up Now** and then the **Click Here** button to download the software to your PC. Click **Run** to download and open the installer.

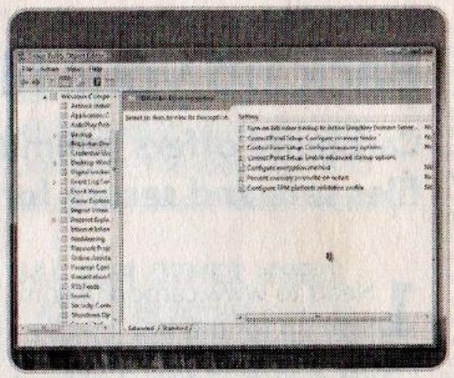
2 After the program has registered, the welcome screen appears and a voice will tell you your choices. Unless you've moved your data folders from the system default, leave 'Automatically back up...' selected and click **Next**. Once you've read the blurb, click **Done** and your backup starts.



3 Your first backup will take several days to complete, running in the background, while future backups are quicker because only new and changed files are added. If the backup is slowing down your internet connection, right-click the Carbonite icon, choose **Options** and tick the **Low Priority** option.



Using BitLocker



Data security has never looked very exciting and BitLocker is no exception

USING BITLOCKER AND THE TPM CHIP

BitLocker (part of Windows Vista Ultimate and Enterprise editions) has been designed to work with PCs that include a TPM (Trusted Platform Module) chip, and if your PC has such hardware then you'll be able to log on normally with BitLocker. If you don't have a TPM chip you can still use BitLocker, but you'll need a USB flash drive. Your BitLocker password will be installed on this drive, and you'll need to insert the drive every time you boot your PC.

ENABLING BITLOCKER ON A NON-TPM PC

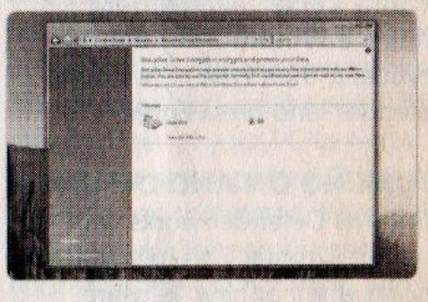
If you don't own a TPM-enabled computer, you need to make a few changes to Windows Vista. First click on **Start** and type 'gpedit.msc' into the search box. Press **Enter** and then click the **Continue** button if the User Account Control dialogue box pops up. Next click on **Local Computer Policy ➜ Administrative Templates ➜ Windows Components**.

ENABLE ADVANCED OPTIONS

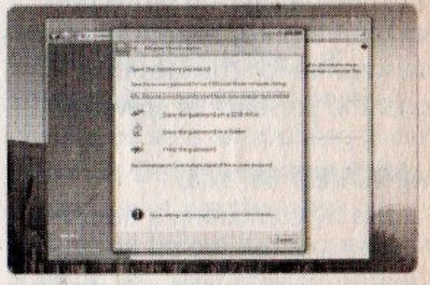
Double-click on **BitLocker Drive Encryption**, then click on **Control Panel Setup: enable advanced startup options**. Click **Enabled** and make sure that the **Allow BitLocker without a compatible TPM** box below it is also ticked. This means you'll be able to use BitLocker with your USB flash drive. Click on the **OK** button. Click on the **Start** menu and then type 'gpupdate.exe' in the Search box. Press **Enter** and wait for the 'User Policy update has completed successfully' message. BitLocker is now ready for you to use.

Turning on BitLocker for the first time

Protect all your data from prying eyes



1 Click **Start ➜ Control Panel ➜ Security ➜ BitLocker Drive Encryption**. Click on **Turn On BitLocker**. Put your USB drive into a spare port and click on **Require Startup USB key at every startup**. BitLocker will now ask you to select the appropriate drive. Click on **Save**.



2 You're now asked where BitLocker should save the recovery password – you need this if changes are ever made to the system startup settings, or if the drive is moved to another PC. There's one final check that checks BitLocker can read your keys – if it can't, you could lock yourself out of your own PC.

3 Once you've logged in, a BitLocker icon appears in the system tray; double-click on it and you'll see that BitLocker is busily scrambling your data. You'll now need to plug in your USB key every time you boot your PC. If you don't, you'll be locked out – so make sure you don't lose your flash drive.

Windows Defender

LAUNCHING WINDOWS DEFENDER

Launch the program by clicking on Windows Defender in Windows Security Center. Alternatively, press the **Windows** key on your keyboard, then type in 'windows defender' and press **Enter**.

WORKING ON AND OFFLINE

Windows Defender works with Internet Explorer 7 to help you decide whether new software should or should not be installed; it provides always-on protection that monitors key system locations and watches for changes that signal the presence of spyware.

IMPROVED BY YOU

It works by combining a number of useful and very clever strategies. Superior scanning and removal technologies use up-to-date spyware definitions created by Microsoft, with help from Windows Defender users who submit reports of potential new spyware, which is why you should send in reports.

DISCOVER UNWANTED SOFTWARE

The Software Explorer section helps you understand which software and services are running on your computer and stops or disables 'rogue' software, including that which starts automatically and communicates over the internet – the Software Explorer lists all of these processes and helps you to stop or disable potentially malicious software.

The deceptively simple looking Windows Defender can stop the most evil of software

AUTOMATIC SCANNING

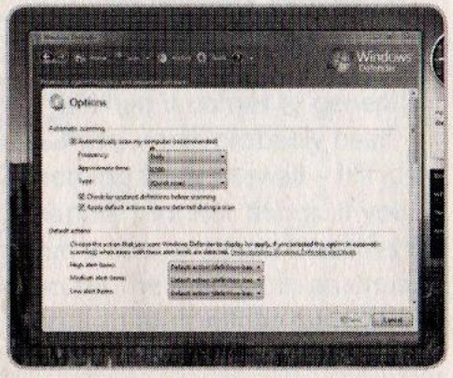
When you launch Windows Defender, it tells you when it last scanned your PC. If you want Windows Defender to scan automatically, click **Tools** in the toolbar. The system scan checks known areas for matches with the definition file; scans are scheduled for 2am, If you want to change the time, use the fields for **Frequency** and **Approximate Time**.

ADJUSTING THE OPTIONS

The Tools and Settings screen enables you to see what software's running and what files are quarantined. It shows the various tools available within Windows Defender; these enable you to track down, analyse and deal with software installed on your PC, be it malicious or not. From scheduling full scans to letting it know how it should handle different alerts and when, or if, it should notify you, it can all be done here.

REAL-TIME PROTECTION FOR YOUR SYSTEM

Real-Time Protection (which is switched on by default) checks on crucial elements of Windows and warns of attempts to change them. Only disable this if you're using another anti-spyware package. At all stages, Windows Defender is simple to use and comes with preconfigured settings to help you set up a stable platform and then continue to stay secure. An easy user interface gives you more control over your software. Common tasks such as scanning, blocking and removing unwanted software are easier than ever to schedule.



Make sure you leave scheduling switched on to scan your system for unwanted software

GET YOUR SCANS ON DEMAND

Scan at any time by clicking **Scan** in the toolbar. The process takes a few minutes because it peers into every corner of your PC to make sure you're spyware-free. Once the scan has completed, Windows Defender will tell you the results. If your PC is free from nasties, you'll see the 'Your computer is running normally' message.

UPDATED DEFINITIONS

Spyware is a constantly being developed so is an evolving threat; Windows Defender automatically makes sure it has the latest definitions before a scheduled scan, so you are better protected from new threats. Definition updates are created by Microsoft analysts with help from an active network of Windows Defender customers who submit spyware reports, which you can choose to join in with.

GET IMPROVED ALERTS

For some reason, by default Windows Defender won't alert you if it doesn't recognise a program doing unspeakable things to your

PC. To make it more active, select **Options**, scroll down and tick the box saying **Software that has not yet been classified for risks**.

ON BY DESIGN

The Windows Firewall is on by default. You can check its status in the Windows Security Center, accessible via the Control Panel or you can type 'Windows Firewall' in Start Search.

CLEVER IS THE WORD

The Windows Firewall helps protect you by restricting other operating system resources if they behave in unexpected ways – a common indicator of the presence of malware. For example, if a component of Windows that is designed to send network messages over one port on your PC tries to send messages via a different port due to an attack, Windows Firewall can stop that message leaving your PC, preventing the malware spreading to other users.

ALLOWING PROGRAMS EXTRA ACCESS

Go to the **Exceptions** tab, which will show you a list of network services – such as File and Printer Sharing – plus all the programs that have been given access through the firewall. If you're having problems with a program or service, the Windows Firewall may be blocking it. So if Remote Desktop, or a similar service, doesn't seem to function, it's worth checking here to see if it has been approved or not. Scan the list of tick boxes and the related name; if you see the service or program as being unchecked, then tick the relevant box and see if that fixes the problem. Using the **Add program** button, it's also possible to add individual programs, plus restrict access for these to the local network or individual IP addresses.

GOOD, BETTER, BEST

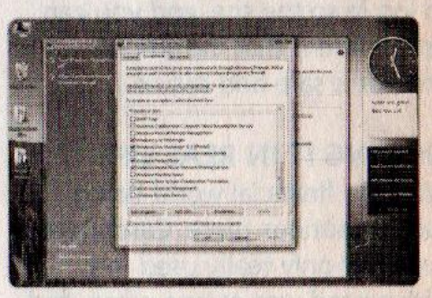
The ability to vary settings in Windows Firewall is handy if you use your PC in different places; Windows Firewall will detect the network connection and uses the appropriate settings to protect.

Slamming the internet front door

"If your name's not down, you're not getting in!"

1 If a program attempts a connection, Firewall asks whether it should be allowed. If yes, Firewall can remember your answer; if no, the program remains blocked. If you're in a potentially insecure environment, the **Block all** option is worth using.

2 Unless you've selected **Block all**, Windows Firewall blocks connections from any programs you haven't added to exceptions. Check **Notify me...** in the **Exceptions** tab so that you can override any decisions you want to. Windows Firewall can have different settings for different connections.



3 When it comes to general use, you'll probably hear nothing from Firewall – it'll just happily monitor things. If you run a new program that tries to access the internet in an unusual way, an alert will be generated and you'll need to decide if the program should have access.

Windows CardSpace

CARDSPACE IN USE

Whenever you visit a CardSpace-enabled web site, you'll see the option to log in via Windows CardSpace – sometimes called an Information Card – and if you choose that option, CardSpace will launch in a safe environment (the rest of your Windows Vista desktop will be faded out) and tell you about the particular site you're visiting. You'll then be able to choose which card you want to use to log in to the site, and you can be confident that the whole process is safe and secure.

FINDING IT IN REAL LIFE

With the financial world being such a cautious place, CardSpace is currently only really used in a widespread way at one place, and that's with the Microsoft Live Login. If you visit login.live.com/beta/managecards.srf you will be able to create and manage an Information Card to log in and out of your MSN Live account. This is a great way to draft up your first real Information Card.

GETTING STARTED WITH CARDSPACE

Windows CardSpace lives in **Control Panel**. To start using it

Windows CardSpace lives in your computer's Control Panel

click on **Start ➜ Control Panel ➜ User Accounts and Family Safety ➜ Windows CardSpace**. Click on **OK** to get rid of the welcome screen and you'll see the main Windows CardSpace screen. To create a new card, click on the **Add A Card** icon and then click the **Add** button at the bottom of the dialogue box.

PICK A CARD, ANY CARD

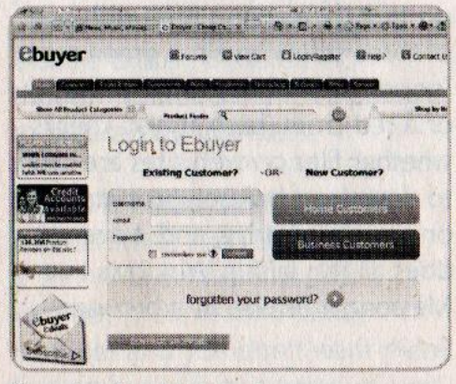
When creating a card you have two choices: you can create a new personal card with basic information about you, or you can install a Managed Card that you've been given by your bank or some other financial institution.

USING MULTIPLE CARDS

It's possible to create multiple cards in CardSpace, so for example you might have one card that includes your home address and phone number but another one that just has your name, email and data of birth. In the near future you'll also be able to download and install Managed Cards from firms such as credit card companies that enable you to store credit card or other financial information for secure shopping or online banking.

LOCKING CARDSPACE CARDS

You can see the contents of your card by clicking **Preview**, and if you look at the top right of the dialogue box you'll see an option to lock your card. This adds an extra layer of protection by asking you to enter a PIN number. If you do this, even if someone manages to get on your PC and log into your account, they won't be able to use your CardSpace cards without also knowing your PIN. When it comes to security, you can't be too careful.



If you're about to hand over any personal details online, make sure this icon is visible

TRACKING YOUR VISITS

Every time you use your cards with web sites, Windows CardSpace will keep track. This means that you can see at a glance which web sites you've given your personal information to.

WATCH THE IE PADLOCK

The all-new Internet Explorer Security Status Bar means you'll know exactly how safe the web site you're browsing is. It cycles through various status colours to highlight if a site is very secure (green), if it appears unsafe (yellow), or if it's very unsafe (red).

Safer surfing

PROTECT YOUR PC WITH FREE ANTI-VIRUS SOFTWARE

Windows Vista doesn't come with any inbuilt anti-virus software, so it's very important that you get some installed quickly, in order to keep your PC free from viruses. PC Tools Free AntiVirus (www.pctools.com/free-antivirus) protects your files and emails from viruses, worms and Trojans in real time, and automatically gives you the latest updates without your having to do anything. It's got an easy-to-use interface and, of course, it's free.

PROTECT YOUR FAMILY WHEN THEY'RE ONLINE

Although strictly speaking this doesn't protect your PC, it is a way of protecting your kids from the hidden perils lurking on a computer. Once installed, Windows Live OneCare Family Safety keeps track of what your children are looking at, or who they're talking to; you can block them from looking at web sites they shouldn't be; and you can access their safety settings wherever you're online. Please note: Windows Live OneCare is a paid-for package, but Family Safety is free: download it at get.live.com/familysafety/overview.

FLUSH OUT AND DELETE MALICIOUS HIDDEN FILES

If you want to go the extra mile, then it's worth getting an anti-rootkit program to complement your anti-virus software. Rootkits can sit hidden amongst your files and their job is to hide viruses from your anti-virus software.

REPORT A DODGY SCAM

If you spot a scam that the Phishing filter in Internet Explorer doesn't know about you can report it by clicking **Tools ➜ Phishing Filter ➜ Report this Website** – which means every other IE7 user will be protected from it in future

SURF IN SAFETY

McAfee's Site Advisor protects you while you surf online. So if you come up against a web site that is unsafe, or has an excessive amount of pop-ups, then Site Advisor will warn you before you go to it by marking links with one of three safety levels: a green cross (good), an amber warning (OK), or a red cross (bad). It also checks whether files on web sites are safe to download before you put them on your hard drive, and it even does all this within Windows Live Messenger as well as a browser.

GET MORE THAN ONE INTERNET HOME PAGE

You can bring back the **File, Edit...** menu by pressing **Alt** on the keyboard, and if you pop into **Tools ➜ Toolbars** you can customise the toolbar icons to suit your way of browsing.

Also in the **Tools** menu you'll find **Internet Options**. If you click on this and then type several addresses in the **Home Page** box – with each one on a new line – then when you launch Internet Explorer it will automatically open each page in its own tab so you can check them easily. It's a massive time saver.

GET INTERNET EXPLORER TO DO YOUR TYPING FOR YOU

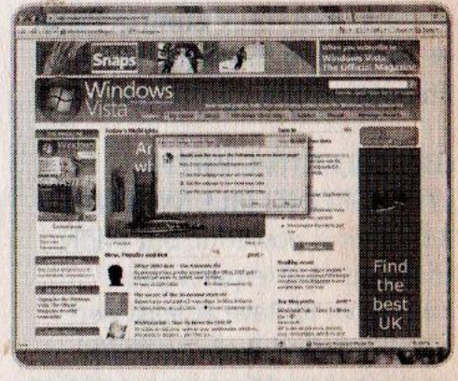
You can use the **Content** tab in Internet Explorer to enable or disable Autocomplete, which can remember things you type in so you don't have to keep typing the same data again and again. Disable this on a shared PC, though – particularly if it's going to be used by strangers.

DELETE YOUR WEB BROWSING HISTORY

If you've been searching for a birthday present for a family member and you don't want them finding out before it turns up, you can delete your browsing data so people don't know what sites you've been to, by going to **Tools ➜ Delete Browsing History**.

MAKE INTERNET EXPLORER EVEN SAFER

In **Internet Options ➜ Privacy** you can make IE7's privacy protection more or less strict, and you can override the settings for specific sites – so you can block tracking 'cookies' from everything but your favourite online shop. You can be really picky about the cookies Internet Explorer accepts: click **Advanced** and you can allow first-party cookies – from the site you're actually visiting – but block third-party ones from advertising networks or any ne'er-do-wells you might come across.



Choose more than one homepage to tailor Internet Explorer 7 to your needs

File encryption

PROTECT VALUABLE DATA FROM SNOOPERS

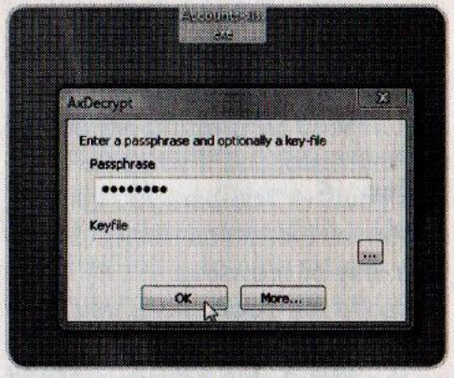
Your PC probably holds all kinds of personal data: bank details, credit card numbers, usernames, passwords, work documents and more. Just one or two of these items could prove invaluable to identity thieves, so it's vital to keep them safe, and there's no better way to do this than encryption.

PROTECT YOUR DRIVE WITH BITLOCKER

If you've got Windows Vista Ultimate or Enterprise editions you could try the Windows BitLocker Drive Encryption. This encrypts an entire hard drive partition, and ensures that only someone with your PIN (or the key stored on a flash drive) can boot and access the system. Read more on the Microsoft site (tinyurl.com/yo3nqa), then click **Control Panel ➜ Security ➜ BitLocker Drive Encryption** to begin set-up.

GET SELECTIVE WITH ENCRYPTING FILE SYSTEM

BitLocker is powerful, but fiddly to set up as it requires your hard drive to have at least two partitions. And it encrypts and decrypts everything on a partition, whether confidential or not, so performance will be affected.



AxCrypt creates self-extracting encrypted files: ideal if you need to email something confidential to a friend

Owners of Windows Vista Ultimate, Enterprise or Business editions have a more selective option in the Encrypting File System (EFS). To use this, right-click a folder containing confidential files and select **Properties ➜ Advanced**, check **Encrypt contents to secure data** and click **OK**. Choose to encrypt that folder, all files and subfolders, and you're done. Windows will protect everything in that folder, and any file you create there.

FULL DRIVE AND DISC ENCRYPTION ALTERNATIVES

If your hard drive is packed with confidential data, and you really need a 'protect everything' solution, then look no further than the free CompuSec (www.tinyurl.com/33aa66). This not only encrypts your hard drive, but also secures CDs, DVDs, USB flash drives and more, making it one of the most powerful security solutions around.

MORE SELECTIVE ENCRYPTION ALTERNATIVES

If you only need to protect one or two files, though, you'll be much better off with AxCrypt (www.axantum.com/axcrypt). Download and install a copy, then right-click a confidential file, select **AxCrypt ➜ Encrypt** and enter a password. Now no one can use the file unless they know your password. Or can guess it, of course. Be sure to avoid obvious passwords like '1234'.

INDIVIDUAL FILE PROTECTION – FOR FREE!

Download and install the latest version of TrueCrypt from the authors' web site (www.truecrypt.org), then click **Start ➜ All Programs ➜ TrueCrypt ➜ TrueCrypt** to launch the program. Now click **Create Volume** to begin the process of creating your encrypted drive. TrueCrypt can create an encrypted volume to store files on a USB flash drive, or do a BitLocker-type encryption of your entire hard drive. We're after something much simpler, though. Select **Create a file container** and click **Next to** continue. Choose to create a 'Standard TrueCrypt volume' and click **Next**. You'll be asked where your virtual drive should be stored. Pick your Documents folder, give the file a bland name like 'vfil' so it won't attract attention, and click **Save ➜ Next**. Accept the default encryption options, and select **Next**. Enter a maximum size for the drive, and press **Next** again. Enter a long password that no one will guess, click **Next**, follow the instructions and click **Format**. Select **Exit** when it's completed to finish the job.

VANISHING TRUECRYPT

Click **Select File**, find the file you just created in the previous tip, click **Mount** and enter its password. Click **OK** and the new drive appears in Explorer. Save files to it, drag and drop there, whatever you like. But click **Dismount** and it'll disappear, its files entirely safe from snoopers.

Stopping spyware

STOP SPYWARE

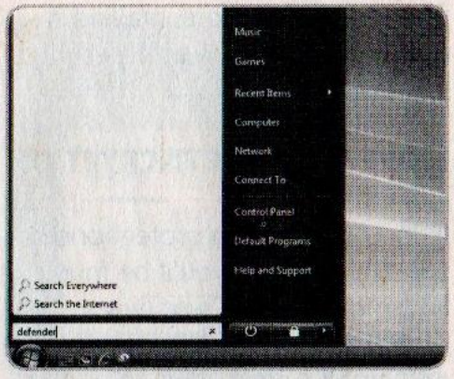
A firewall is a simple application that watches all packets of data entering and leaving a PC through the Ethernet or Wi-Fi connection, and allows or blocks the traffic depending on a set of predefined rules. When it's switched on, Windows Firewall blocks inbound traffic from other computers that try to connect to your PC, unless you give permission.

CHECKING UP

To get into the Windows Firewall advanced settings, type 'Firewall' into **Start Search** and press **Enter**. Here, you can customise the inbound and outbound rules for allowing or disallowing applications. Normally, you won't need to use this panel, but it can be useful if you're experiencing problems to see a complete list of what the Firewall is allowing through to your computer.

BETTER DEFENCE

Windows Firewall doesn't monitor all outbound traffic. While it will scan for and block known malware, it's hard to clamp down on it completely. Windows Defender provides a more robust defence. It will monitor programs as they're installed and warn you if malware is trying to get onto your drive.



Windows Defender will help protect your PC from all sorts of threats

START THE DEFENCE

Access Windows Defender from the Security Center or by typing 'Defender' into **Start Search**. The four icons at the top of the Defender home page are all you need to take control of your PC.

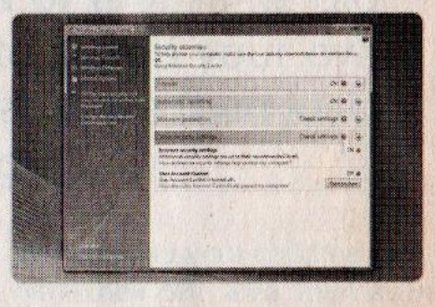
SCAN AND SEARCH

Clicking on **Scan** in Windows Defender will run a thorough check of all your drives. In exactly the same way that an anti-virus program looks for files infected with a virus. Under **Options** in the **Tools** tab, if you scroll down the page you'll find 'heuristic' scanning, which means Defender will pick up unusual program behaviour as well as known malware threats.

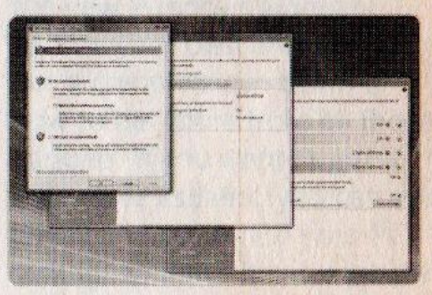
Protect your data using Windows Vista

Build a fence around your personal data

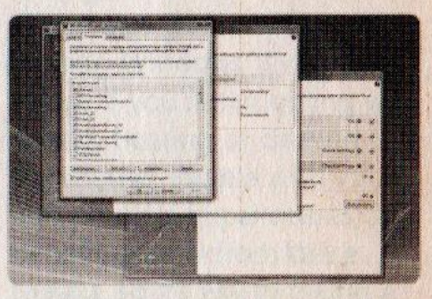
1 Both Windows Defender and Windows Firewall can be accessed from the Security Center. Simply double-click the red or green shield icon in your system tray, and you'll see the status of your PC's security. Select **Firewall** from the list on the left.



2 Unless you have a third-party firewall provided by another software company, make sure Windows Firewall is turned on. You only need one firewall running at any one time. New internet programs will require explicit access to receive information.



3 From the **Exceptions** tab, you can allow or disallow programs. Some online games may require a new port opening: simply click on the **Add Port** button and type in the numbers required. Remember, a port isn't closed when the game shuts down.



Customising Windows Vista

If you're getting bored of that same old background, it's time to stamp your own mark on things and get more than just a fresh background image...

Everyone has their little quirks. Batman liked spending time with Robin, Spider-man liked hanging around town and Superman enjoyed wearing his pants on the outside of his suit. It takes all sorts, but no matter what you like doing or how you like things to be, we're sure you're going to want to give Windows Vista your own personal touches. Some of those could be just cosmetic – everyone likes their own wallpaper. Others can be functional, tailoring the Start Menu or Windows itself to fit better with the way you work.

We've got a goodly selection of different tips that you can use to change how Windows Vista looks, works and acts. If you want to adjust Windows so your children can have their own area, then we've got that. If you want to make the new Windows Sidebar feature your own, then we've got a complete run down of how to get more from all those gadgets. If you want to get a little more esoteric, you can even tweak and customise your PC's settings to make it more power friendly and save you money.

Change it all

We've also got a section on making Windows Vista easier to use if you're struggling with seeing, hearing or dealing with the mouse. People with visual and physical impairments can benefit greatly from these tweaks, so it's worth taking a look, and frankly, many are just as useful to everyone else as well.

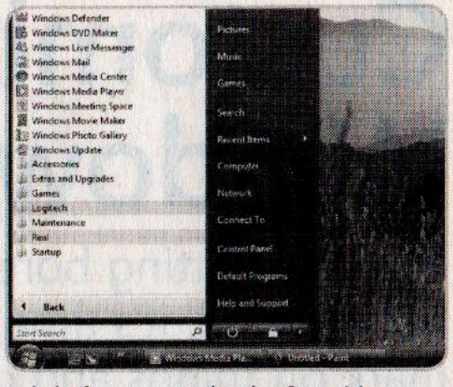
Improve the Start Menu

OVERHAUL THE START MENU

It's time to hit the Start button; the gateway to the Start menu. As in Windows XP, there's a 'Pinned Programs' section at the top of the left menu. This retains permanent links to programs while the rest of the left menu updates dynamically. Pinned Programs comes with internet (Internet Explorer 7) and email (Windows Mail) links by default but you can add other programs here by right-clicking them and selecting **Pin to Start Menu**. You can also drag and drop folder shortcuts here. Underneath this are the programs you've used most recently, with the most commonly used programs at the top. But all of this is just a taster and far more abilities are hidden away inside its new dark interior.

LESS PINNING PROGRAMS TO THE START MENU

A subtle change from Windows XP, where the menu displays only the most commonly used programs, but an important one: how often have you installed a new program in Windows XP then waited an age for it to appear on the Start menu? That's when you might resort to pinning programs, but the Windows Vista approach pretty much guarantees Start menu shortcuts are more relevant to your current habits.



Subtle features make the Start Menu a handy tool and a pleasure to use

HIDE ITEMS FROM THE MENU

The program list could be a giveaway that you've been playing games instead of working so you may prefer to deactivate this! Right-click the **Start** button, select **Properties** and uncheck **Store and display a list of recently opened programs**. You can do the same for recently opened files, too.

NO SCREEN-SIZE START MENU

All Programs opens in the Start menu with a vertical scroll bar. When you click a folder icon within All Programs, it expands the contents in a drop-down list, so the Start menu always updates dynamically. Click the **Back** button at the bottom of All Programs to return to the Start menu view.

GET SEARCHING WITH THE START MENU

The Start menu hooks you up to **Search Everywhere** and **Search the Internet** options. The former launches a standard search window; the latter fires up Internet Explorer and conducts, by default, a Windows Live web search. You can switch between them easily by using the arrow keys.

BACK TO BASICS: GET THE CLASSIC MENU BACK

To get the old Start menu back, right-click the taskbar and select **Properties ➜ Start menu** tab **➜ Classic Start menu ➜ OK**.

CUSTOMISE THE MENU

The Start menu can be customised by right-clicking **Start ➜ Properties ➜ Customize** in the **Start Menu** tab. For instance, you can convert the Control Panel to a menu rather than a link.

USE THE WINDOWS KEY TO SEARCH YOUR PC

Given the overwhelming integration of search within Windows Vista, you might expect a permanent search field. However, if you hit the **Windows** key or click the **Start** button, a live cursor appears in the search field, so you can type your search terms. Using the **Windows** key as a search button tells you something about the importance of search within Windows Vista.

READING THE NEW NAVIGATION SYSTEM

Windows Vista uses 'breadcrumb' navigation. Looking at the contents of the address bar, it shows that System and Maintenance is to the left of the Welcome Center. This indicates that the Welcome Center is located within System and Maintenance. To open System and Maintenance, point at the name in the Address bar – it glows blue – and click. The window changes to System and Maintenance and you're in the heart of the toolkit. The breadcrumb in the address bar is now Control Panel, as it's the parent of System and Maintenance. To get back to the Welcome Center, click on the back arrow, to the left of the address bar.

BREADCRUMB MENUS

If you point at the arrow between any two connected entities in the address bar, you'll get a drop-down menu providing links to key features within the parent. If you click the double chevron at the far left of the address bar, you can trace through the hierarchy and jump to key locations, including your user profile.

Customise accounts

ACCOUNTS & KIDS

Windows Vista offers unrivalled control on how your system looks and performs, and enables you to personalise it like never before. Whether you use your PC as a family tool, an entertainment hub or just for work, you can get more from your computer. Kids are frighteningly computer savvy these days and still possess that insatiable curiosity. This makes them adept at savaging your PC with a few clicks and an innocent smile. But you can protect valued data using the new, improved user accounts. Set the younger members of your family up with a new account in **Control Panel ➜ User Accounts ➜ Manage accounts ➜ Create new account**. You then have the option to make them a standard user, which means they can't make changes to any crucial parts of your computer.

GET KIDS' FAVOURITE TOONS ON YOUR DESKTOP

There are a host of fun Windows Sidebar gadgets, such as a live panda webcast and a *Calvin and Hobbs* cartoon gadget. Another great option for children is GoPets, which allows them to adopt a pet to live on their desktop. The pet

With just a few additions, transform your desktop into a playground

will then wander off and make friends around the globe, putting your kid in touch with others from different countries. It's available from www.gopetslive.com.

DESKTOP SHORTCUTS

Add lots of clearly labelled shortcuts to the desktop, so your children can find their way round the computer easily and use Windows Vista to its full effect.

GET PERSONAL WITH CUSTOMISATION

As with other versions of Windows, colours and backgrounds are fully customisable, but now all the options are in one place, accessed by right-clicking the desktop and choosing **Personalize**. This takes you to the **Personalization** menu, where you can alter the theme and background, the colours of bars and menus, screensavers and even the mouse pointer.

GET DREAMSCENE CONTENT

Since the release of Windows Vista, the internet modding community has been in overdrive, finding and releasing new content for the customisable features. If you're running Windows Vista Ultimate, the video backgrounds provided by DreamScene are a sure-fire way to make your PC come alive. New DreamScene content is available through the Windows Update facility – click on **Windows Update** in the **Control Panel**.

EVEN MORE WALLPAPER

If you aren't running Windows Ultimate, or feel the moving backgrounds place too much demand on your system, don't despair. The photographer who took the original Windows Vista backgrounds has released the ones that didn't make it, and they're available online at www.hamaddarwish.com.

GETTING RID OF THE FLASH

If you use your Windows Vista PC more for business than entertainment, then you can increase your productivity. Substance over style is most likely to suit, so you may want to return its appearance back to the familiar. Right-click on the desktop and choose **Personalization ➜ Window Color and Appearance**. In the next menu is an option to **Open classic appearance properties**, which enables you to turn off the Aero glass effects, and return to solid menu bars.

ADD NEWS TO THE DESKTOP

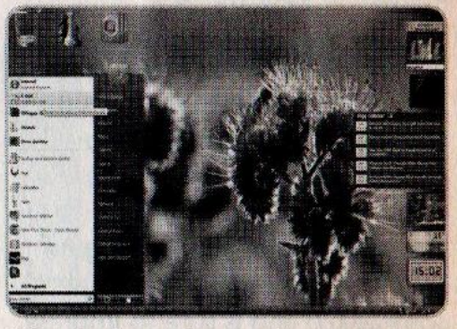
If your job relies on the latest financial information, for example, you can have it beamed straight to your desktop with the Feed Headlines Sidebar gadget.

STREAMLINE YOUR LOOK

Banish distracting Sidebar gadgets such as the games and photos, and go for less busy but more functional ones. Windows Vista comes with some great gadgets that help make your PC more productive, such as the contacts, currency converter and calendar.

ADD A BUSINESS GADGET TO YOUR WINDOWS SIDEBAR

As a business user, the Windows Sidebar can also help boost your



A few basic tweaks can change a desktop into a far friendlier place for everyone who uses it

productivity. You can save time and be better organised by using the Microsoft Office Outlook 2007 gadgets at gallery.live.com. These bring your email and appointments straight to your desktop, and will stop important messages stagnating in your inbox. The Outlook Upcoming Appointments gadget means that the desktop can become the focus of your working day, rather than individual programs.

GET AN ICONIC DESKTOP WITHOUT ANY TEXT

You can make your desktop cleaner by removing the text from your icons. Just right-click on an icon, and rename it by typing '255' into the space while holding down **Alt.** This should remove all text. For the second icon, hold down **Alt** and type '255255', for the third type it three times, and so on. Holding down **Ctrl** and rotating the mouse wheel will let you alter the size of your icons.

FOUR DESKTOPS, THAT SPIN!

This program allows you to run four active desktops that you can flick between by holding **Ctrl** and **Shift** and using the directional buttons. The program can be downloaded from snipurl.com/2ea2o and is sure to impress everyone who sees it.

Using TweakVI

If you really want to give Windows Vista a makeover, you can go even further. TweakVI, available from www.totalidea.com, offers unprecedented control over the operating system's appearance. TweakVI works by offering an easy way to add registry entries, without having to do the complicated editing yourself. Many parts of the Windows Vista system can be altered, from folders on the Start Menu to the speed with which Flip3D rotates through windows. Tweak VI also allows you to take snapshots of your system at any time, so if you aren't happy with the changes, you can change back instantly. It's a good idea when using software such as TweakVI to use the restore points in Windows Vista as a precaution, so that you can go back to a previous date if you encounter any problems.

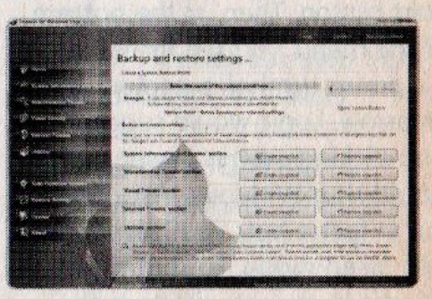
BE CAREFUL!

While TweakVI is a powerful tool it can affect Windows Vista in ways that might not always be desirable. One such way is via the System folder and Control Panel restrictions plug-in. Using this it's possible to block access to areas of Windows Vista. So check you don't lock yourself out of areas you might want to use.

Use TweakVI to customise Windows Vista

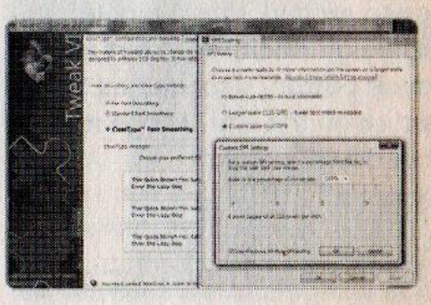
A handy utility to save you time

1 Before you start playing with TweakVI it's advisable to use the snapshot feature to save the 'before' images. This way, if you don't like what you tweak, you can restore at the click of a button. As with other software, it's also advisable to set restore points in Windows Vista.



2 Now you've safeguarded your PC, it's time to tweak. In the **Visual Tweaks** menu, choose the **Start menu tweaks**. From here you can banish the menus you don't use. The desktop options allow you to disable icons, and rid yourself of the dreaded taskbar balloons.

3 To make Windows Vista look even better, try using the **Font Smoothing** options in the **Visual Tweaks** section. Choose a ClearType style, and click **Change screen font DPI settings**. Choose a **Custom DPI** and try 105 per cent to make your fonts look clear and bright.



Further customisation

SHUT DOWN WINDOWS VISTA FOR REAL

When you want to shut down your PC, you first click on the Start button. Then, at the bottom of the menu, you see three icons – a power symbol, a padlock and an arrow. Logic would suggest that clicking on the power button would shut Windows Vista down, but in fact it puts your computer into Sleep mode. To shut down Windows you actually have to click on the arrow, then choose Shutdown from the menu.

CHANGE THE SHUTDOWN BEHAVIOUR

Press the **Windows** key and **R** on your keyboard and type 'CMD' to open up a command prompt. Now type in 'powercfg.cpl,1' to open up the advanced power settings. You'll see an item called **Power buttons and lid**. Click on the + sign to expand it then click on the + sign next to the **Start menu power button**. It should say **Sleep**, so click on this and change it to **Shut down**. Voila!

Make sure your PC actually shuts down and doesn't just go to sleep

USE A GADGET INSTEAD

An alternative to all of this, if you're a fan of the Sidebar, is to install a Shutdown gadget. Have a look at the Gadgets gallery at gallery.live.com and choose one you like, for example, there's one called Shotdown, by Fox-Kz.

DEFRAGMENT SPEED

The Windows Vista defragmentation tool is now automatic and runs at low priority in the background. You can still choose to defragment manually, but because the tool has been simplified, you have no way of knowing how defragmented your drive is, or indeed how far along the defragmentation operation the tool has progressed. Instead run a free third-party solution, Power Defragmenter (download it from tinyurl.com/pz2d7).

BRING YOUR GADGETS TO THE FRONT

When windows or programs are masking the Sidebar, you can bring hidden gadgets to the foreground simply by clicking the Sidebar icon or by pressing the **Windows** key and the **Space** bar. The Sidebar itself remains fully transparent so gadgets float over whatever else is happening on screen.

FIND THE MINI TOOLBAR

When you point at a gadget, a standard mini toolbar fades into view. Its three buttons enable you to close the gadget, to access its options menu, and to drag it to a different spot on the Sidebar – or off the Sidebar and onto the desktop, where you can put it wherever you like.

HAVE GADGETS ABANDON THE WINDOWS SIDEBAR

It's possible to have a Sidebar void of any attached gadgets whatsoever with them all floating around the desktop. However, you should note that closing the Sidebar removes even detached gadgets from the desktop.

TOOLBARS FOR EXTRA GADGET FEATURES

Some gadgets have their own handy little toolbars that appear when you point at them. For instance, the Slideshow gadget has buttons for skipping backwards and forwards through images, which are themselves culled from the Windows Photo Gallery.

ADDING NEW GADGETS

To add new gadgets, click the + sign at the top of the Sidebar. You'll find a small collection of gadgets already installed on your computer, such as a sticky note application and a live weather feed. But for the real fun, hit the **Online** link and see what third-party developers have in store. Some are deceptively simple and instantly useful, such as digital radio players which eliminate the need to go near a browser.

Windows Vista offers a few gadgets; go online to see the full catalogue and start building up your collection

Saving power

ADJUST YOUR POWER PLAN TO SUIT YOUR NEEDS

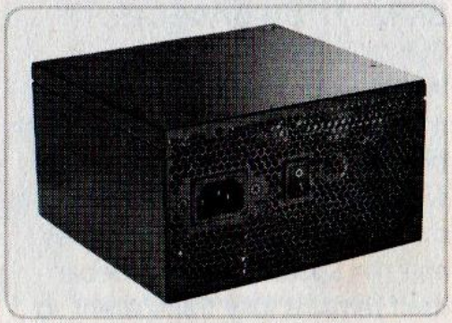
Windows Vista provides an excellent tool to lower your energy usage, which you can find by typing 'Power Options' in **Start Search**. From here you can choose from three pre-set options, which differ depending on how much energy you want to save and what performance you need.

CREATE AND CUSTOMISE YOUR OWN POWER PLAN

If you'd like to customise your own plan, click on **Create a power plan** in the left-hand pane of the **Power Options** window and select how long you'd like your monitor to stay on, and how long before your PC goes into Sleep mode.

GETTING INSIDE YOUR POWER PLAN

To get really involved in your PC's power management, click **Change plan settings** underneath any of the custom or pre-set plans. Click **Change advanced power settings** and you can alter many of your hardware or software settings – if you'd like to change when your hard drive powers down, you can do it from here.



A new power supply in your PC could help save more than you'd think

TRACK POWER USE

The LocalCooling power management software (download from www.localcooling.com) does pretty much the same thing as the Power Options, but goes one step further by incorporating a display which tells you how much power your PC is consuming, and which hardware device is using the most. It also gives you the option to allow certain programs to automatically power up your PC when they're in use, so if you're using Windows Live Messenger and you want your PC to wake up when you receive a new message, you can make it to do so.

ENERGY-EFFICIENT PSU

You might not know it but even before the power gets into your PC you could be losing a third of it thanks to an inefficient power supply. Akasa produces a range of 80 PLUS power supply units that exceed the 80 per cent mark for energy efficiency in use, so if you're building a new computer or upgrading an existing one, then its 400W or 500W power supply units are definitely worth considering.

GET AN LCD MONITOR

To save a big chunk of electricity, get rid of your hefty CRT monitor, which uses up to three times as much power as a TFT LCD one.

GADGET STOPS AERO

You can even download a program from www.peacelovecode.com/#VistaBatterySaver that turns off the Aero graphical interface when you disconnect a notebook from the mains and turns it back on when it's reconnected.

EFFICIENCY IS CRUCIAL

A PC using power management options can be up to six times more energy efficient than one that isn't. To put that into context the most efficient PC – using less than a third of the energy of the least efficient PC – will still use more energy with its power options off than an inefficient PC using power options.

SWITCH TO A LAPTOP PC

A modest laptop can use up to a tenth of the energy of a desktop system, making them the most power-efficient computing option.

SAVE ENERGY BY DESIGN

Look for the Energy Efficient Label on new PCs. By choosing a PC with the logo, you could save up to $300 over the lifetime of its use.

EFFORTLESS TURN OFF

If you regularly turn off your PC to save electricity, you can now conserve your own energy while doing so; the Bye Bye Standby kit remotely turns off your mains without you having to fiddle around with tangled cords and awkward-to-reach switches. Find out more at www.byebyestandby.com.

LOW POWER PC

The Dell Studio uses a fraction of the power of a regular computer with a much lower than average power consumption – saving you a considerable amount of money over a long-term period. Prices start at $999 so it shouldn't even break the bank. Get it from www.dell.com.au.

FACTS TO MAKE YOU SWITCH

As a planet, we consume nearly twice the amount of electricity we did seven years ago. While there are more than 660,000,000 computers around the world today, less than 10 per cent of the global population own a PC. A reasonable-quality PC left on for 24 hours a day, seven days a week uses the equivalent of a 42 gallon barrel of oil every 90 days.

CUSTOMISE YOUR PC'S POWER USE

PCs account for around nine per cent of the world's electricity consumption – the figure may sound small but it's actually a startling amount of power use. So, short of ripping all the mains sockets out of your home, is there anything you can do to lower this figure? Well, yes actually, there's quite a lot. Leaving your PC running when you're not using it wastes a lot of energy, but if you put it in a low power state at times when you're using it intermittently and turn it off at the mains when not in use, your energy consumption drops dramatically. Recent reports from energy companies highlighted that even if you've got a powerful computer, you can cut its electricity bill down from over $250 per year to as little as $70 per year.

Ease of access

GET READY FOR SPEECH RECOGNITION

Speech recognition is built into Windows Vista. You get the best results if you use a headset, so plug a headset USB or analogue into your PC to get started.

TAKE THE TUTORIAL

It's a matter of telling Windows Vista you've got a headset and following a couple of dialogue boxes before trying the interactive tutorial. The tutorial takes you through the essentials, so you learn how to dictate, navigate and, most importantly of all, the "What can I say?" command that brings up a quick reference window.

EASY COMMANDS

Basic commands such as: "Start Notepad", "Start WordPad" and "Close window" let you use Windows Vista mouse and keyboard free.

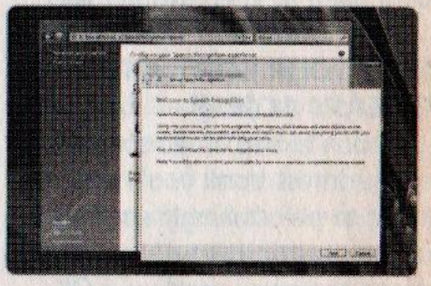
FIX TEXT AS YOU SPEAK

Accuracy should be excellent, and to correct an error you just say "correct" followed by what you want to fix. Say it again and a numbered list comes up. So if, for example, the recogniser has written 'store" instead of "stone" then to fix it you say "correct store", "stone", "one", "OK". Easy.

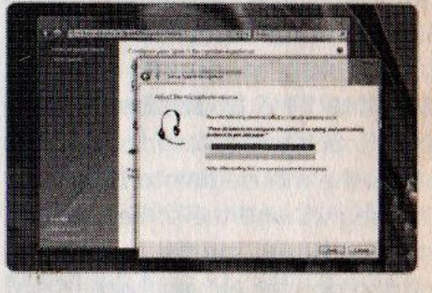
Set up Windows Vista speech recognition

Add speech control to your PC

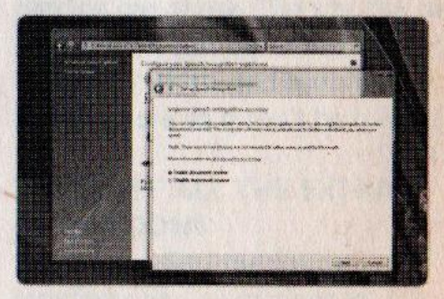
1 Connect your headset or microphone to your PC. Click **Start → Control Panel → Ease of Access → Speech Recognition Options** and then click **Set Up**. Now you need to inform Windows Vista what kind of microphone you're using. Click the appropriate option and then click **Next**.



2 The next stage involves reading out the on-screen text, so that Windows can automatically adjust your microphone's volume level. Windows will then offer to scan examples of your existing documents to get a feel for the kind of words you commonly use. Click **Yes** to this option.



3 Next up is the tutorial. This shows you how speech recognition works and it also helps the speech engine learn to recognise your voice.



TROUBLE WITH MUSIC

Windows Media Player works fine with voice control, but it demonstrates another headset issue: when you're listening to music, you can't concentrate on what you're dictating. So you might want to keep this in mind.

STORE YOUR CONTACTS FOR EASY ACCESS

If you don't keep email contacts in the address book you'll end up having to painstakingly spelling out the domain name. Navigating around the email window is OK and as with other programs, you can use the "show numbers" command to divide the window into numbered sections.

MOVING THE MOUSE

Speech recognition even moves the mouse pointer. Say "mousegrid" and the screen splits into nine boxes; say the number and the pointer moves there. Repeat to move the mouse with incredible precision.

Short cuts

ADD MORE ICONS

Right-click the desktop, select **Personalize ➜ Change desktop icons** and tick **User's Files**. Now your documents, contacts, favourites, pictures, music and more are just a double-click away, without touching the Start menu at all: much better.

PIN PROGRAMS TO YOUR START MENU

Locating applications in the All Programs menu can be tricky, even with the new Search box, but there are ways to make this easier. Open **Start ➜ All Programs**, then navigate to and right-click on the link to a favourite application. Select **Pin to Start Menu** and your program will always appear at the top of the left-hand menu panel, no searching needed.

USE THE QUICK LAUNCH

Alternatively, right-click your program link, select **Add to Quick Launch** and a little icon for the program should appear on your taskbar. Now you can launch the application with a single click, or even a key press (hold down the **Windows** key and press **1** for the first Quick Launch icon, **2** for the second and so on); it's at your finger tips and much quicker than browsing menus.

ADD ICONS AND SHRINK OR SUPER-SIZE THEM

Right-click on a Start program icon, drag it to the desktop and select **Copy** to leave it there. Then hold down **Ctrl** and use your mouse scroll wheel to change icon size, from tiny to huge.

GET A NEW LOOK

To customise the background, desktop colours, and even whether it includes icons like Computer or not, right-click an empty part of the desktop and then click **Personalize**.

USE TOOLBARS

Toolbars give you quick access to useful functions at any time. Right-click the taskbar, click **Toolbars**, and select **Desktop**, for example, to enable you to launch desktop files, even when they're covered by other applications.

CUSTOMISE THE START MENU

Select **Start ➜ Properties ➜ Customise** for Start menu tweaks. Display the Control Panel as a menu for faster access, turn off links you don't need, change Search defaults to scan your whole system, and more.

GADGETS ON YOUR DESKTOP

Drag and drop gadgets to the desktop by right-clicking the Sidebar and selecting **Add gadgets**.

SPEEDY SHUTDOWNS

Right-click the desktop, select **New ➜ Shortcut**, type 'shutdown /p'. Click **Next**, call the shortcut 'Shut down' and click **Finish**. Now you have an easy shortcut for shutting down your PC from the desktop.

DOWNLOAD GADGETS

Right-click the Windows Sidebar, select **Add Gadgets**, try tools like the Calendar or Weather checker, then download more from gallery.live.com, such as a tool to monitor eBay from your desktop.

UP THE DPI SIZE

For users with bad eyesight, changing the DPI settings for fonts in Windows Vista is an easy fix. Just right click on the desktop and choose **Personalize.** On the right, click **Adjust font size (DPI)**, and you'll find an option to increase the size (120DPI instead of 96).

MAKING THE MOUSE EASIER

The mouse pointer can easily be adapted for people who find it hard to see or use. The size can be increased, it can be turned to black instead of white, and even have a flashing aura so it can't be missed.

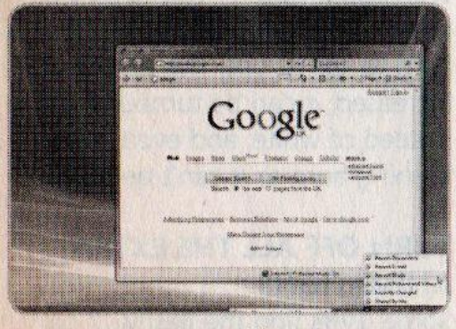
TURN OFF ALL THE EXTRA ANIMATIONS

Some users find the flashy interfaces and animations in modern software distracting when

using the PC. In the Ease of Access Center you can choose to turn off busy images to make focusing on important tasks much easier.

CUSTOM TOOLBARS

Right-click the taskbar and select **Toolbars** for more useful customisations. Click **Address** to enter URLs directly from the taskbar, **Links** to see the Internet Explorer Links menu or **New Toolbar** to choose a folder.



Creating your own toolbars is a great way of accessing common items

Accessibility Center

GETTING TO THE ACCESSIBILITY CENTER

Some of these functions were available in Windows XP, but they were rather obscurely 'hidden' in the Control Panel. In Windows Vista these visual and audio tweaks are there for all to see and can be amended to suit the user's preferences by hitting the **Windows** key and **U**. (If you need to make adjustments before you log in, hit the **Ease of Access** icon on the User Account screen.)

WHAT ACCESS OPTIONS WINDOWS VISTA OFFERS

The Ease of Access Center offers minor and major adjustments to Windows Vista in all aspects, from slightly adjusting background contrasts for those with poor eyesight, to setting up special input and output devices for people with severe impairments. If you want to find out how you, or your family and friends, could benefit from Ease of Access Center simply press the **Windows** key and **U** while on the desktop.

MAKE SURE WINDOWS VISTA SUITS YOU

The Ease of Access Center also means that you don't have to accept the system's recommendations on how

Windows Vista should look and act. You can make lots of minor adjustments to the appearance of Windows Vista, in order to make it a little easier to use.

TAKE THE RECOMMENDATIONS

Within the Ease of Access Center there's a **Get Recommendations** link. This will take you to a questionnaire, with different scenarios of access problems ranging from finding words difficult to see in certain lights, to being dyslexic. Just check any that apply and Windows Vista will suggest several visual changes to the display that could help.

ZOOM IN THE DESKTOP

Users who are particularly poorly sighted can opt to have the magnifying tool open when your computer boots up. To arrange this, open the Start Menu and type 'magnifier'. This is a great tool and can transform fiddly features into simple tasks once again. The level of zoom in the area around the cursor can be set anywhere between 2x and 16x in the window which accompanies the magnifier, which is displayed in a separate window which sits at the top of the screen.

HEAR THE DESKTOP

There is also an interesting function in Windows Vista where a narrator reads out the options you hover your mouse over, while navigating the screen. Don't worry, you won't need to a hire a suited man to dramatically dictate your online antics; instead an electronic voice will read out on-screen commands – a big help to users with poor sight.

GET YOUR VOICE RECOGNITION WORKING

Some computer users suffer problems with using the keyboard and mouse, so the Ease of Access Center provides possible solutions by integrating voice recognition to replace the traditional input sources. This means users can speak commands rather than click with the mouse, so that programs can be navigated more quickly and easily than ever before. The voice recognition in Windows Vista is much improved over previous incarnations, and it is now entirely possible to use your PC with a microphone instead of a mouse.

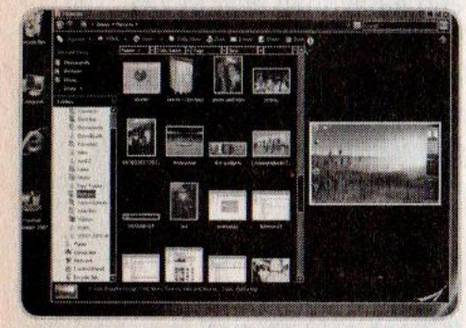
OPTIONS TO HELP WITH LEARNING DIFFICULTIES

It is not only physical impairments that the Ease of Access Center caters for; learning difficulties are also addressed. Dyslexic users will find a host of options available,

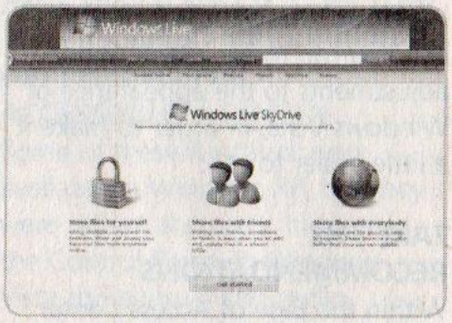
such as adjustments to the time messages are displayed for, changes in background colours to provide better contrast and, again, that option to have the narrator read out on-screen options.

TURN ON THE HIGH CONTRAST

This setting can be turned on at anytime by pressing **left Alt** and **left Shift** and **Print Screen**. It changes the background to black and text to white, which can make on-screen text much easier to read for people with poor sight.



You can easily make tweaks to improve your experience. Just hold **left Alt** and **left Shift** and **Print Screen** to turn on high contrast mode



Windows Live SkyDrive is the perfect way to store and access your files

SkyDrive

MOVE FILES ONLINE

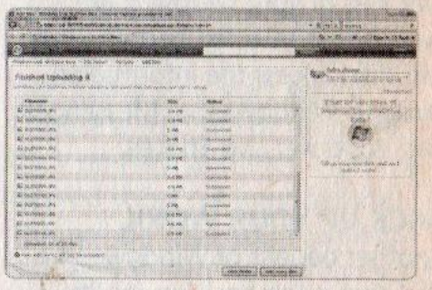
Our computers are fast becoming the hub of our lives, organising everything from our music and videos to memories and precious documents. When our physical possessions can be transported around with us easily, why should our digital ones be locked down in one place, or require a multitude of devices to be carried with us when we're out and on the move? Windows Live SkyDrive means you can take your information wherever you go. Put simply, Windows Live SkyDrive is a 500MB disc in cyberspace, and it's yours totally free. It's secure, safe and means you can access your information from wherever you are. It's also designed to mirror your Windows Vista PC with provisions for documents, music, pictures and videos.

Set up your Windows Live SkyDrive

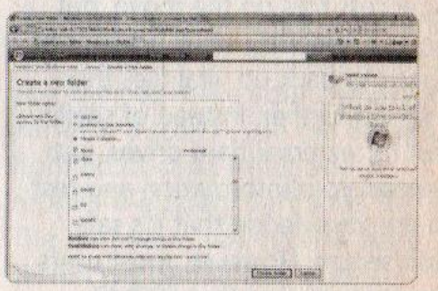
Get a second hard drive in just three easy steps

1 Log on to skydrive.live.com and sign in with your Windows Live ID. If you haven't got one, what are you waiting for? It'll only take a few minutes and it's free! You should now see your SkyDrive. Folders are provided so organisation is easy, and your space takes the form of your existing folders.

2 Go to the Windows Live SkyDrive folder you wish to upload to, and hit the **Add Files** button. In the beta version you can only add files by browsing for them one at a time. Install the upload tool to overcome this. Enable the ActiveX Control by clicking the bar when asked so you can drag and drop files.



3 The files will then be queued for upload. In the beta version files have a limit of 50MB. You can set up shared folders so people can have access to selected files. Drag and drop files into your shared folder and choose Windows Live contacts to access them.



STORE THE FILES YOU NEED

Imagine you're about to go to work and you want some music to play, that file you were working on last night, and the pictures of your holiday to show off to your workmates. Just upload them to Windows Live SkyDrive before you leave and you're sorted. Uploading is simplicity itself, and the fast transfer rates mean you won't be sat around all morning waiting.

EASY ACCESS FOR ALL

Windows Live SkyDrive is much more than an online storage centre. It also allows you to set up shared and public folders, meaning that files of your choosing are available to selected people. They can then access the information through Windows Live Messenger and Windows Live Spaces.

BACK UP YOUR WORK

Another benefit of Windows Live SkyDrive is the back-up facility it offers users. If you don't feel the need to share information or access files on the move, but need a relatively small amount of space to back up vital files then look no further. Instead of shelling out for external hard drives, just upload your information and rest in the knowledge that it's safe and secure. However, most users are likely to find that 500MB disappears quite fast.

Take a look at some of the extras that Start++ brings to the Start Menu

Start++

START WITH START++

To get started head to snipurl.com/2yu2e and download the application. This will essentially turn your Start Search bar into a command line, where typing in simple prefixes will open up a new world of information. When installed an icon will be placed on your taskbar, and Start++ will run constantly. You can open Start++ to see the lists of commands, gadgets, and short cuts available from your Start menu.

WHAT'S AVAILABLE?

Command lines in Start++ range from short cuts to all the major search engines, to services from IMDb and dictionary.com. You can also use the feature to get other services including 'weather' which will turn the entire search menu into an iPhone-style weather forecast page.

TAKE YOUR FIRST STEPS

First try running simple web searches from your desktop. Hit the **Windows** key to display the start menu, then type 'I' followed by your search term. A new window will open with the results of your query. Next try using some of the Start gadgets, and see how much time you could save. Typing 'd' followed by a word gives you a dictionary look-up, and even better, 'w' gives you the Wikipedia definition.

FIRE UP APPLICATIONS

Start++ is not just about web services, though, as there are lots of productivity gadgets which are used by just by hitting your **Windows** key and typing in a command. Typing 'calc' followed by a sum will automatically do the maths and display your result in the start menu.

BUILD PLAYLISTS

You can also take command of your computer using Start Search, and this functionality gives a glimpse into the way we could control our PCs in the future. You can build instant playlists by typing 'play' and then following your command with an artist, album or even genre. The playlist will be automatically populated with the tracks and your entertainment will begin.

SEARCH FOR IMAGES

If you have a large collection of images and they're bristling with tags, then it's easy to find an image of interest. Just type the command 'pics' followed by a list of tags you want an image to match. Start++ will then display a slideshow of those images right there in the Start menu for you.

CUSTOMISE START++ ITSELF

While the functions in Start++ are fantastic, they are very generic. Luckily it's easy to add your own short cuts and start personalising the services to your advantage. First, open the Start++ console. Next decide on the program or web site you would like to quick start using your start search. Choose a web site or program. Click on **New** and then type the desired short cut into the box. This will be what you type into the Start Search field to run your desired command. Keep it short, relevant and easy to remember. Now paste the web address or program name into the command line. If this is a search engine, and you want to make your command perform a search, use the address from an existing result and replace the query part with '%+'. The next word you type in start search will be the new query.

RUNNING PROGRAMS

If you want to run a program, then when adding a short cut type in the name of the executable file you wish to run. For example, if you wanted to start Windows Live Mail you would write 'wlmail.exe'. To do this for your chosen program, browse to the program's folder in Windows Explorer and find the name of the file which runs the program.

Window layout

GET THE OLD MENUS BACK

If you've used previous versions of Windows you might be wondering where the standard menu bars have gone. They're still there – just hidden away. It's possible to temporarily display the menu by pressing **Alt**, or it can be permanently displayed by choosing **Organize ➜ Layout ➜ Menu Bar**.

GET MORE FOLDER OPTIONS

The Folder Options dialogue is still available, with many useful advanced options, such as being able to fix the window style and position or resetting the current window style. Open the window by pressing **Alt** and choosing **Tools ➜ Folder Options**.

COMPRESS THOSE FILES

Windows Vista supports a variety of easy ways to compress files and folders so that they take up less drive space; perfect for emailing or storing files on small-capacity USB flash drives. One way to do this is to right-click on a selection of files or folders and select **Send To ➜ Compressed Folder**. This creates a single compressed file of the selected files or folders, which can easily be emailed or copied to another drive.

COMPRESSED FOLDERS

There is a more permanent method of compressing files, by taking an existing folder and transforming it into a compressed folder, in which everything is compressed but still looks and acts like a normal folder. You can do this by right-clicking a folder, selecting **Properties**, clicking the **Advanced** button and ticking the **Compress contents to save disk space** tick box.

FINDING HIDDEN FILES AND FOLDERS

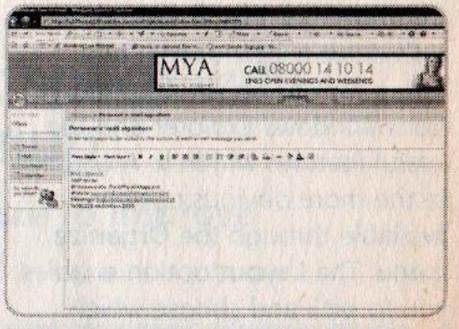
Go to **Windows Explorer ➜ Organize ➜ Folder & Search Option ➜ Folder Options ➜ View ➜ Advanced Settings**, and choose **Show Hidden Files and Folders**.

CHANGING FILE TYPES

A file is usually associated with the program that created it or the program that should open it. For example, in the case of a text document that was created in Notepad, the file will have the Notepad file type, and display the corresponding Notepad icon; when you double-click it, it will open in Notepad. Sometimes this isn't desirable, as you want to edit the file in another program. In these cases, you can either run your chosen program and open the file from within it, or you can right-click the file and select **Open With**; if you can see the program listed in the menu, select it to have the file open with that program. If you select **Choose Default Program** this opens a new dialogue box. Using this you can permanently change the program that opens that type of document, so in our example it's possible to have text documents always open with WordPad.

ADD AND REMOVE WINDOW PANES

Click the **Organize** button in any standard window to reveal a host of useful folder options, not least of which is the **Layout** option. This enables you to add or remove a section of the window layout, such as the preview pane.



Add and remove areas of windows to make them work how you want them to

USING THE FILE PREVIEW PANE

Open this via the **Organize ➜ Layout** menu. This is a good example of one of the extra panes that Windows Vista can make available. It'll display helpful information or a thumbnail image of the currently selected file.

GET OLD-SCHOOL WINDOWS BACK AGAIN

If you find the new Windows Vista windows a bit much, it's possible to calm things down and just have them display boring icons in nice, safe lists – just like Windows of old. This can be helpful on slower computers as it puts less strain on the system. To do this, press the **Alt** key, choose **Tools ➜ Folder Options**, select the **Use Windows classic folders** option and click **OK**.

CUSTOMISE YOUR LAYOUT

Let's delve a little deeper and take a look at ways to get more from Windows Explorer and the useful features within it. A couple of the more obvious options are available through the **Organize** menu. The **Layout** option enables you to pick and choose which areas of the standard windows are displayed. By removing different 'panes' this can help maximise the amount of visible space available, while adding panes makes useful features available. Other areas of the interface can be tailored to your wishes, such as returning the old-school menus to their glory. Indeed, the entire window system can be reverted back to the classic system if you so wish. It's all a matter of experimenting with the folder options and seeing what works best for you.

GET OLD-SCHOOL WINDOWS BACK AGAIN

If you like all your windows looking the same, you can force Windows Vista to apply the same style, position and even file view to every window that's opened. To do this, press **Alt** and choose **Tools ➜ Folder Options ➜ View** and click the **Apply to All Folders** button.

EASY ACCESS

Not everybody finds that the standard way computers work suits them, which is why there are some handy accessibility tools built right into the heart of Windows Vista. These tools are really designed for people who have a disability of some kind, but most people will find something useful here. Tools such as the Magnifier come in handy for anyone finding that the writing on computer screens has mysteriously been getting smaller over the last few years! Or is it our eyesight that's just getting worse? For those who do have a physical disability, whether it's a visual or aural impairment, or something that causes difficulties when using a standard keyboard, then using these tools could be essential to using a computer comfortably, or even at all.

REDUCE KEYBOARD USAGE

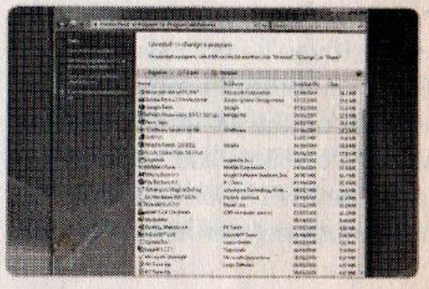
Click **Make the keyboard easier to use** in the Ease of Access Center and you can also turn on Sticky Keys. This makes it possible to press key combinations such as **Ctrl** and **Alt** and **Delete** one key at a time, instead of having to press them all together – which some people might find difficult.

Create more disc space with a computer Cleanup

Remove unwanted software to improve your PC's performance

1 You've installed so much software that your hard drive has filled up, slowing down your PC. Type 'cleanup' into **Start Search** and click on **Disk Cleanup** to find files that may be deleted; check the box next to any you don't need, and click **OK**.

2 Work your way through the Start menu, folder by folder, removing any non-essential programs or ones you no longer use. Click **Control Panel ➜ Uninstall a program** to catch the rest.



3 Finally, click **Start ➜ Search ➜ Advanced Search**, choose **Computer** as your location, and search for files greater than 10,000KB in size. This will reveal all downloads and files that are consuming valuable disc space.

SOUND OUT THE KEYS

Toggle Keys plays a sound whenever you hit the **Caps Lock** key. If you usually look at the keyboard rather than the screen when you type, you'll find you occasionally hit the **Caps Lock** key and discover that EVERYTHING IS NOW WRITTEN IN CAPITALS. If you set your computer to make a sound when you hit **Caps Lock**, you're more likely to be aware of any accidental activations.

EASIER MOUSE USE

One feature that's worth trying out is to make Windows Vista activate a window whenever you hover over it with the mouse – it's a bit strange at first, but if you can get used to it you'll find it saves you a lot of unnecessary mouse clicks. Just click on the **Make the mouse easier to use** link. You can also customise the colour and size of your mouse pointer here.

INCREASE THE TEXT SIZE

The final useful feature we'll cover is the ability to make the text and icons on your desktop bigger. You'll find this option in the **Make the computer easier to see** section. This leads you to the DPI scaling options. Click on **Larger Scale (120 DPI)** to make text more readable. Note that you'll need to restart your computer to see this change.

Registry tweaks

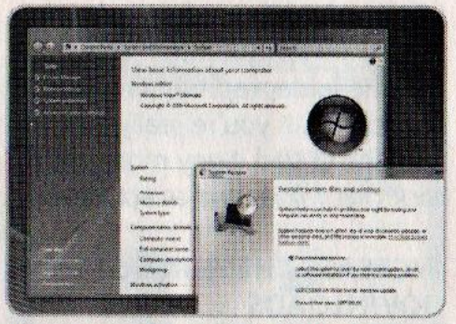
INTRODUCING THE REGISTRY

There are many ways to change your settings and your applications within Windows Vista. You might click **Edit** ➜ **Preferences** or **Tools** ➜ **Options**, right-click on a system tray icon, or just poke around in your Control Panel. But the end result is almost always the same. When you've tweaked an option and clicked **OK**, the new setting will be stored in a central database called the registry.

Normally, you don't have to worry about low-level technical details of individual registry settings. But occasionally they can come in useful. If a program won't start or can't be reinstalled, for instance, it could be down to a corrupt registry setting: change it and you might fix the problem. Other applications have useful settings that can only be accessed from the registry, too.

TREAD CAREFULLY

If you delete the wrong registry settings you could corrupt an application, and even prevent Windows Vista from loading on your next reboot. But then, Windows Explorer can be dangerous, too, if you start randomly deleting things from the Windows or Program Files folders. Don't worry, though



Use System Restore to back up registry settings before you start changing anything – or you may regret it later

– as long as you're cautious and sensible, registry editing poses very little risk.

STARTING REGEDIT

Click Start, type 'regedit' in the Search box, and press **Enter** to launch the Registry Editor. Hit **Home** to jump to the top of the registry, and you'll see it's divided into five sections:

HKEY_CLASSES_ROOT holds all of your file associations.

HKEY_CURRENT_USER holds personal settings for your applications, Windows Vista desktop configuration and more.

HKEY_LOCAL_MACHINE has detailed, system-wide information on installed applications, drivers, services and so on.

HKEY_USERS holds all of your user-profile files.

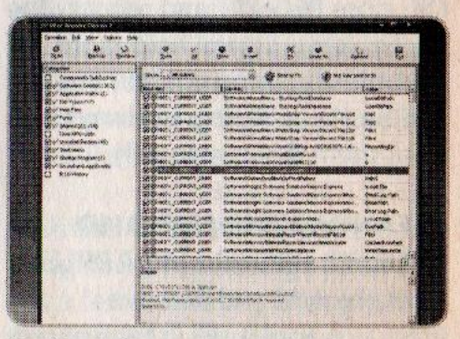
HKEY_CURRENT_CONFIG contains your hardware setup.

BROWSING THE REGISTRY

Each section is divided into folders, and so each individual key (piece of information) is specified in something similar to a hard-drive folder. The registered user and company name you entered when installing Windows Vista, for example, are stored at HKEY_LOCAL_MACHINE\Software\Microsoft\Windows NT\CurrentVersion. If you want to change this, expand the tree by clicking the arrow to the left of each registry key name until you get to the right folder. Look for the keys **RegisteredOwner** and **RegisteredOrganization** on the right-hand side; to change one, double-click it and enter a new value.

GET A FREE CLEANER

Registry cleaners certainly aren't useless but they're just not the miracle cure that some claim. So if you want to try one, don't



Don't pay for a company to clean your registry settings, as there are free programs you can download

pay big money: programs such as Eusing Free Registry Cleaner (www.eusing.com) or Wise Cleaner (www.wisecleaner.com) all do an excellent job for free.

CREATE REGISTRY SHORTCUTS

Registry key names can be long and difficult to remember. But don't worry, there's an easier way. Select a key in the Registry Editor, click **Favorites ➜ Add to Favorites** and it'll remember it.

INCREASE THE RECENT ITEMS

Do you wish the Recent Items menu held more than 15 documents? Launch REGEDIT, browse to **HKEY_CURRENT_USER ➜ Software ➜ Microsoft ➜ Windows ➜ CurrentVersion ➜ Policies ➜ Explorer**. Click **Edit ➜ New ➜ DWORD (32-bit) Value** to create a new registry key, and call it MaxRecentDocs. Double-click the key, select **Decimal**, and enter 25 as the new value. Click **OK**, close REGEDIT and reboot. The Recent Items list will hold more documents, saving you the time and hassle of having to always track them down manually.

CLEANING THE ADD AND REMOVE PROGRAMS APPLET

Does the Add and Remove Programs applet still list a program you uninstalled long ago? Go to HKEY_LOCAL_MACHINE\SOFTWARE\Microsoft\Windows\CurrentVersion\Uninstall and find the folder representing that application. If you're really sure you don't need it any more, right-click that folder and select **Delete**.

INCREASE THE NUMBER OF DOWNLOADS

You've discovered a web site that's crammed with files you need, yet Internet Explorer only lets you download two at a time. Why? It's a default setting, but not one you'll find in the **Tools ➜ Options** dialogue box. You can only change it through the Registry Editor. Click **Start**, type 'regedit' in the Search box and press **Enter** to launch the Registry Editor. Press **Home**, then + and the right arrow, click the arrow to the left of HKEY_CURRENT_USER to expand the tree, and work down to Software\Microsoft\Windows\CurrentVersion. Click **Internet Settings** in the left pane, then click **Edit ➜ New DWORD Value** and call it MaxConnectionsPerServer. Double-click the value, set it to 8 and click **OK**. Create a DWORD Value called MaxConnectionsPer1_0Server, set that to 8, close the editor, reboot and enjoy simultaneous downloads.

Gadgets can be installed from your browser, usually in just a few seconds

Custom gadgets

GADGETS RULE

Your PC is the gateway to all kinds of valuable information, but sometimes it can take a little work to produce the results you need. You'll have to launch your browser before you can check something on Wikipedia, for instance, fire up Windows Explorer to organise some files, or navigate to the calculator just to add up a few numbers. But not any more. Install the right gadgets on your Windows Sidebar, and they'll deliver all the functionality and information you need, right there on your desktop.

We've scoured the internet, downloaded and tested the best gadgets we could find. So, if you've been looking for an Amazon price check, an Application launcher or need one of a myriad of other little jobs doing, we're sure there's a gadget around for you.

GET ADDING GADGETS

Gadgets live on the Windows Sidebar, so launch that if it's not running already: type 'Sidebar' in the **Start Search** box, then click **Windows Sidebar**. Click the + sign at the top of the bar to see the gadgets that come included with Windows Vista, including a calendar, clock and contacts list. Double-click any and you'll find that they appear on the Sidebar.

ADDING ONLINE GADGETS

Click **Get more gadgets online**, and your browser will open at Microsoft's Gadget Gallery. As you might guess from the name, the gallery is full of gadgets. The gadgets are split into categories such as 'Fun and Games', 'Multimedia', 'Safety and Security', 'Search Tools' and more, so it only takes a moment to find examples that might interest you.

ONLINE COLLECTIONS

Widgipedia (www.widgipedia.com) has a few interesting examples and Build A Gadget (www.buildagadget.com) is home to some of the best gadgets around.

With Screen Snaper (snipurl.com/1xfsr), you can capture complete screens, windows, objects or regions, then automatically save the image in one of seven popular formats.

SEARCH EVERYTHING

When you want to look up a price on Amazon, don't bother with Internet Explorer. Instead, just type what you're looking for in Ultimate Explorer, a gadget that can have a permanent place on the Sidebar, and it delivers the results right away. You can search Google, eBay, Amazon, Yahoo!, Digg, Wikipedia and more from one very configurable gadget. Find it at snipurl.com/2yv4k.

DUMP YOUR QUICK LAUNCH TOOLBAR

App Launcher (find it at snipurl.com/1xfd5) is more flexible, and frees up valuable space on the taskbar. It's the best way to start applications and comes with lots of bonus features as well.

WEBGUIDE

Access your local Windows Media Center, then browse recorded TV, your programme guide, scheduled recordings and more with WebGuide from www.asciiexpress.com/webguide/gadget.aspx.

THE MAGIC FOLDER

Drag a file onto this gadget from snipurl.com/1xfox and it'll automatically move it to the right folder: Documents, Pictures, etc.

MULTIFUNCTION CLOCK

It's a clock. And a countdown tool. And a lap timer. And even an alarm clock, with your choice of sound files. Download it from snipurl.com/1xfin.

CLIPBOARD MANAGER

Just a simple list of your recent clipboard history (text only), making it easy to recall the content you need. Find it at snipurl.com/1xff0.

SYSTEM CONTROL

Get sidebar access to Shutdown, Restart, Lock, Switch User, Task Manager, StandBy, Run, LogOff, and Command Prompt functions, by downloading this handy gadget from www.buildagadget.com/Blog/systemcontrol.

MAKE YOUR OWN GADGETS

The Amnesty Generator can convert many widgets, Flash games and other applications into gadgets. Download it from www.amnestywidgets.com/products. Choose **Widgetbox** in the site list, and click **Open Site in Browser**.

CREATING A GADGET

Find Tetris on www.amnestywidgets.com in the Games section, click **Details**, set Width to '148' and Height to '250'. Click **Get Widget → Get Widget Code**, click in the Flash section so all text is highlighted, then right-click that text and select **Copy**. Right-click in the Amnesty Generator 'Step 2' box and select **Paste**. Press **Tab**, then replace the program code with the name Tetris. Leave everything else at its default settings, and click **Generate**. The Generator will pause, then disappear. Click the + sign at the top of your Sidebar, then double-click Tetris. And that's it – you've got a tiny but perfectly playable version of the game installed as a gadget. What else can you add? Install the generator, explore its list of sites, and find out!

ZIP THAT GADGET

Wondering what's in the .gadget file you've downloaded? It's easy to find out. Rename the file to have a .zip extension, then double-click it to have a look

MAKING GADGETS WITH MICROSOFT

Can't find the exact gadget you have in mind? Then create your own. A new Microsoft service called Popfly makes it easy, even if you know nothing about web development. The results aren't always perfect – Popfly is still a beta version – but it's easy and free. Visit the site, www.popfly.com, click **Sign in**, and enter your Windows Live ID. Popfly is designed to help build mashups – programs that combine different sites to create something new. These can also be saved as gadgets. Popfly uses Microsoft Silverlight; if you don't have Silverlight, you'll be asked to install it.

System tweaks

SAVE POWER

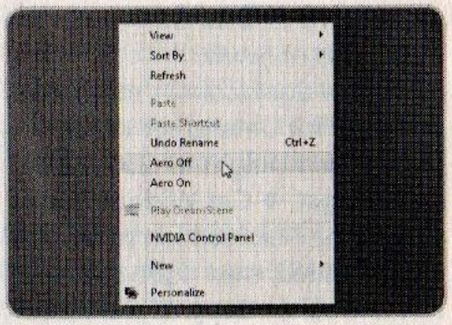
To disable Windows Aero at will, run REGEDIT and go to HKEY_CLASSES_ROOT\Directory\Background\Shell. Right-click the Shell part, select **New ➜ Key** and call it 'Aero On'. Right-click the **Aero On** key you've created, and create a new key called 'command'. Double-click this (in the right-hand side of the screen) and give it the value Rundll32 dwmApi #102.

Right-click Shell again, select **New ➜ Key**, and call this 'Aero Off'. Create a command key below it, as you've just done, and give it the value Rundll32 dwmApi #104.

Now, right-click an empty part of the desktop to see your options, and select **Aero On** when you want fancy effects such as Flip 3D, and **Aero Off** when you're after raw speed.

EASY UPDATES WITHOUT THE BOTHER

The next time you find yourself revisiting a frequently updated site such as Digital Spy, Digg or BBC News, stop and select **Tools ➜ Feed Discovery**. If the site provides an RSS (Really Simple Syndication) feed then you'll see one or more links listed here. Choose one and click the **Subscribe** option. Now, launch the Windows Sidebar, if it's not already running, click the + sign and double-click the **Feed Headlines** gadget. This will pop up and display all the latest headlines from the site, and they'll be updated as new stories appear.



Forget about poking around in Control Panel, and toggle Windows Aero on and off in a couple of clicks

FLASHY FILE MANAGEMENT

How would you like to copy or move a file directly from its right-click menu? Then try this: Launch REGEDIT, go to HKEY_CLASSES_ROOT*\shellex in REGEDIT, and click ContextMenuHandlers. Select **Edit ➜ New Key**, call it 'Copy To', double-click it and enter the value {C2FBB630-2971-11D1-A18C-00C04FD75D13}. Create another key called 'Move To', with the default value {C2FBB631-2971-11D1-A18C-00C04FD75D13}. Right-click a file now, choose either option, and a pop-up window will appear where you can immediately choose the destination folder. Easy!

SHORT ON DISC SPACE?

Freeing up space starts with the Disk Cleanup tool. Type 'Cleanup' in **Start Search** to find it, launch, then let it find and delete redundant files. Browse your Program Files folder to see if there's any data left from uninstalled applications. Don't delete anything unless you're 110 per cent certain it's safe, though. Use the Advanced Search option to search your PC for files larger than 100,000KB. This might reveal ZIP files, videos or others that are taking lots of space.

INSTALLATION OVERLOAD

Most people have a few programs they don't need, and this will waste space and slow down defrags. Click **Control Panel ➜ Uninstall** a program occasionally, browse the list and remove anything that doesn't get used.

STARTUP OVERLOAD

Some programs unnecessarily run at start-up, using resources and slowing down your system. Type 'Defender' into **Start Search**, open it and click **Tools ➜ Software Explorer**, choose any surplus to requirements and click **Disable**.

INTERNET OVERLOAD

Internet Explorer can become unstable if you install too many add-ons. Press **Alt** then click Tools **➜ Manage Add-ons ➜ Enable or Disable Add-ons**, then select any non-essentials, click **Disable**, then restart your browser.

SECURITY SINS

You turned off UAC – but also disabled Internet Explorer's Protected Mode, so to get back to normal, type 'User' in **Start Search** and click **User Accounts ➜ Turn User Account Control on or off**. If you've turned UAC off before, check the **Use User Account Control** box to get it working again, then click **OK**. The prompts will return, but there's another solution for that.

Now, to get rid of the UAC prompts, launch secpol.msc (only in Windows Vista Ultimate edition), go to **Local Policies ➜ Security Options**, double-click **User Account Control: Behavior of the elevation prompt...** and set it to **Elevate without prompting**.

An easy shortcut: If you're running Windows Vista Home Basic or Home Premium editions, and don't have secpol.msc, then run REGEDIT, go to HKEY_LOCAL_MACHINE\SOFTWARE\Microsoft\Windows\CurrentVersion\Policies\System and set ConsentPrompt BehaviorAdmin to 0 (use 2 to restore the default setting). UAC is still running, so Internet Explorer 7 Protected Mode works, but the prompts have gone.

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For more information visit
www.vistamag.com.au

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